

SOCIAL SPACE

PERSPECTIVES
SOCIAL INNOVATION LABS
INNOVATION IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION
ON THE WILD SIDE

SOCIAL SPACE

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INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

STEPPING INTO A COLLECTIVE FUTURE THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

Following the closure of the United Nation's peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste, a new form of engagement involving the country, and local and international agencies has emerged. **Noeleen Heyzer** describes the current state of development in the young nation, and shares how active collaboration at all levels can engineer breakthroughs in helping a country unlock its potential in the region.

Dr Noeleen Heyzer is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. She is currently the UNSG's Special Adviser for Timor-Leste, working to support peace-building, state-building and sustainable development.

She was the first woman to serve as the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since its founding in 1947. Under her leadership (August 2007 to January 2014), the commission focused on regional cooperation for a more resilient Asia-Pacific, founded on shared prosperity, social equity, and sustainable development. She was at the forefront of many innovations including for regional disaster preparedness, inclusive socio-economic policies, sustainable agriculture and urbanisation, energy security and regional connectivity.

As the previous Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women, she was widely recognised for the formulation and implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

She holds a BA and a MSc from Singapore University, a PhD from Cambridge University, and has received numerous awards for leadership.



*Dr Heyzer with Cristo Rei of Dili in the background.
Source: UN Photo.*

"... I BROUGHT [ZERO HUNGER] TO OUR REGION AS THE LARGEST NUMBER OF THE POOR LIVE IN ASIA... I TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT WE NEEDED TO LAUNCH THIS AS A REGIONAL AGENDA BECAUSE WE HAVE TO END HUNGER AND POVERTY. THESE PROBLEMS ARE AVOIDABLE."

Dr Heyzer, how did you come on board to become the Special Adviser to Timor-Leste?

Timor-Leste voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999 and became a fully independent state in 2002. Since 1999, the UN has supported the country's transition with five successive missions mandated by Security Council Resolutions: UNAMET, UNTAET, UNMISSET, UNOTIL and UNMIT.¹

After the end of UNMIT's mandate in December 2012, the country wanted a new form of engagement with the UN. When the Secretary-General visited Timor-Leste, there was discussion on what that new engagement could be. They wanted an innovative partnership, one in which the country was very much in the driver's seat. Many names were being recommended, and in the process, the government made it clear that they wanted not so much a governance-political person, but more a development person who could link the country to the region. The Timorese government asked for me and between the country and the Secretary-General, they decided. For this role, you need to have the trust of the leadership—of the President, the Prime Minister, and many of his Cabinet Ministers. With the country feeling that they got what they wanted, it became much easier for me to do my work.

What was your previous experience with Timor-Leste prior to this appointment?

When I was the Executive Director of UNIFEM, we focused on women in conflict-affected countries. This was particularly after the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 that looked at women, peace and security, which my team and I helped to draft. There were issues of justice and support to networks of women who could engage with the rebuilding of the country.

We managed to build women's leadership and support them in Parliament. Timor-Leste today has the highest percentage of women parliamentarians in Asia.

The country gained independence in May 2002, and in January 2003, I visited Timor-Leste. That must have been my third visit to the country. This time, it was to respond to a call by a woman in the mountainous region of Mauxiga. This was also where the Prime Minister himself was hiding when he was a resistance fighter. It was a place where the brutality against women was terrible, because they were hiding the resistance fighters. This woman named Olga De Silva hitchhiked to Dili because she heard about the Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation. She told my national programme officer, "At the time of the struggle, we sacrificed so much. But in times of peace, no one has come to provide us with support services. And we have not seen our leaders." I heard her in New York and I wanted her to know that.

I went up to Mauxiga accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Health and my UNIFEM team. When we arrived, the villagers were out dancing to receive us. It was very moving. We listened to the stories of the people, and understood their sacrifices, their problems and also what was most needed. I said to the Deputy Minister, "I want to make a pledge. And I want you also to make a pledge."

My pledge to the community was to bring a team of Singapore doctors as the community faced the problems of severe maternal mortality and stunted growth of children. I announced my pledge and the Deputy Minister of Health also promised to establish basic health services. Later, I got in touch with Dr Kanwaljit Sooin and with help from Robert Chua (our current ambassador in Myanmar

who was with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Singapore at that time), she headed a team to the mountains. Today, the community is better served and have basic healthcare.

How would you compare Timor-Leste now and Singapore in its early days?

Singapore did not experience the type of violence and atrocities that Timor-Leste went through. You have a country where about 100,000 out of one million people were killed. Another 100,000 had died because of starvation, hunger and diseases. So 20 percent of population was lost, perhaps even more, because many of them had already left as exiles. The base could have been like 800,000. So you can imagine the trauma of having lost 25 percent of your population, the trauma of having your whole city, or your whole country burnt down to ashes. Timor-Leste is a country that rose out of the ashes, and has made remarkable progress.

Singapore, on the other hand, did not have such a violent history. Even if the literacy rate of our adults before independence was relatively low, the level of human capacity was much higher than in Timor-Leste. I think one similarity could be the unemployment situation. Singapore was also struggling at that time with urban poverty. We had squatters in many of the areas. In fact, I can still remember the night soil carriers in my childhood and that would be hard to explain to the younger generation. But, even then, we had comparatively good infrastructure and institutions from the British upon which to build our future.

We had a good educational system too. In fact, I went through the local educational system till my master's degree. We had the English language to contend with. And we didn't have 23 dialects like the Timorese. Our official language and dialects were not such a big political issue: we were educated in a widely used international language. We were also very urban and very well located geographically. This was the site of the entrepot trade, which was the hub of many crossings. Geographically, although there was trade in Timor-Leste it was never the

kind of hub that Singapore was. For these reasons, we can't quite compare the two. The histories are different and the struggles of Timor-Leste are much greater.

The two countries have different starting points and very different trajectories so far, but Singapore has also tried to reach out and help Timor. We understand there is a lot of assistance and the Timorese officials come to Singapore to train. Has that been useful?

Extremely so. I think Singapore has been a very good friend to Timor-Leste. In fact, through the Singapore technical cooperation programme, about 470 government officials have been trained. Many of them are trainers of Timorese trainers in diplomacy, port management, governance systems, customs, taxation and what is needed to run the government. Singapore has done well by Timor-Leste.

Timor has a very young population—are there specific development challenges that come with such a demographic?

There are huge challenges because 70 percent of their population is under 30 years old. And the birth rate is about 5.8 in urban areas and over 6 in the rural areas. So you're going to have a very young population. That can be an opportunity because you can have a youth dividend if you know how to invest in it. Currently though, it's a challenge. It's not a dividend yet, until you know how to unleash the creativity and the potential of that population and channel it into real options for the future.

Currently, overall unemployment is a problem, and the youth unemployment rate is extremely high. This can lead to a rise in violence or criminality. It's what I call a "new fragility." Therefore, it is critical to generate employment very quickly. The problem with Timor-Leste is that it's still an economy that is petroleum-based, and therefore it's more capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive. The main challenge is to diversify its economy in such a way that it can generate productive employment for the young. The country can build on both its current and future economic strength to diversify its economy by



Dr Heyzer with Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand and Prime Minister of Timor-Leste during the launch of Zero Hunger Challenge in Dili.

Source: UN Photo.

investing in sustainable community tourism, agriculture and fisheries, and petroleum industries.

There is already an infrastructure and construction agenda that can generate jobs. However, because the alignment of jobs and skills is not quite there, many of the jobs have gone to migrant workers. Jobs are also being created in Special Economic Zones. It's critical to do an analysis of what types of jobs are needed. You can develop basic skills for the young in areas like road construction, repairs of electricity, carpentry, sustainable energy and so on, then align them and get these young people into employment. Of course, in terms of construction, it has gone not just to the locals but also to foreign companies. Still, the country can develop an agreement whereby foreign companies coming in are required to train the locals—this is what Germany did—and eventually to provide them with skilled employment.

In terms of job creation, are there other opportunities?

Timor-Leste is importing food and literally all other goods. Their import bill is very high. So you can actually study what can be generated locally instead. You can have import substitution of some of the basic commodities.

There should also be a focus on sustainable agriculture because many of the people live up in the mountains and are subsistence farmers.

In addition, Timor-Leste is a very beautiful country. It is scenic, rugged and absolutely stunning. You can have a flourishing tourism industry, but you need to know how to build up the service sector and social infrastructure for that type of industry to flourish. It's not going to be a five-star tourist destination, but it can be a place for adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and historical tourism. The focus need not just be on Timor-Leste alone but the region. You have both the forest and the coral belt. The Prime Minister understands this and the potential of sustainable tourism.

Simple solutions can help create new employment opportunities as well. In Dili, you see people trying to develop local markets and businesses. There are stalls selling fish for example. But the fishes are on the *gala* (bamboo) poles. Of course the fish rot in the hot sun. They need ice boxes and ice to preserve the fish. These solutions are simple things that can get people started. We can get youths excited about sustainable development, innovations and waste management. The potential is there and is visible. There are so many opportunities to intervene at the local level.

There is a need for shared responsibility in the whole creation of a new country and the shaping of collective futures. Can you elaborate on that in the context of Timor Leste?

There are so many players—the government, the country's leadership, the civil society and the local communities. You want your private sector to be responsible, to share the same vision of development. You want your international community, your international partners, to share the same vision of where you want to go. The government has done this by having a 20-year strategic development plan, and the five-year government programmes to implement the plan to transform Timor-Leste from a least developed country to an upper-middle income country by 2030.



*Dr Heyzer with local people of Timor-Leste.
Source: UN Photo.*

The fifth government plan is already there, focusing on concrete government programmes. However, no development journey, or what I call the development drama, can be played out alone. For this shared responsibility, you need to have all the different actors working as a team. They have to be part of the same story with shared responsibility to eventually reach their destination.

The country has engaged all their development partners in their journey. They have Quarterly Development Partners Meetings. All the partners are there and there's accountability for what they have done to implement this plan. You have civil society, donors, the private sector and the government on the same page, talking about how they have contributed. I just witnessed their budget process in January this year. The budget is to provide the resources for the implementation of these plans. In Parliament, you have five political parties to make sure there is accountability in the use of resources.

In the coming together of different sectors, what has been civil society's key role in bringing the development agenda forward?

Civil society has done several things. One is to hold the government accountable to its people. There are some very vocal and dynamic civil society actors. They've helped to implement programmes and projects at the local village level. They have also sent out early warning signals when things are not working out. They have

alerted the international community on what they see as problems.

The women's groups have been very active. They were the ones who brought my attention to what was happening on the ground to maternal mortality, and the stunted growth of the children. At the time of the budget discussion, I invited the Princess of Thailand, HRH Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to launch the Zero Hunger Challenge² in Parliament in January under the leadership of the Prime Minister. It was historic because in Parliament you debate things. All the five political parties engaged in the debate on the Zero Hunger Challenge and it has now become a national agenda.

For me, this was a remarkable breakthrough, and it was only through a real partnership between the Timorese government and the UN that it was possible. First of all, the member states of ESCAP (when I was Executive Secretary) elected Prime Minister Gusmao to be the chair of the 69th ESCAP Commission. Zero Hunger is the Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon's campaign, and he launched it at Rio+20 in Brazil in 2012.³ His campaigns are usually global, but I brought it to Asia-Pacific as the largest number of the poor live in Asia—842 million people are still hungry in the world and 543 million live in Asia. I told the Prime Minister that we needed to launch this as a regional agenda because we have to end hunger and poverty. These problems are *avoidable*.

"...THIS WORK IN TIMOR-LESTE HAS ALSO SET A NEW GLOBAL STANDARD FOR HOW CAMPAIGN GOALS CAN BE REALISED AND HOW ZERO HUNGER SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN ALL REGIONS OF THE WORLD. ... MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT SHOWS THE DIFFERENCE THAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN THERE IS LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL WILL AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL."

The Prime Minister agreed and launched it with other Prime Ministers who were present at the commission session.⁴ I also invited my Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson together with five other Under-Secretary-Generals. It was a big event and the Prime Minister was leading the region.

The challenge now at the national level in Timor-Leste will be in the implementation. But I am very encouraged as there is the establishment of a national implementation council (KONSSANTL) consisting of eight relevant government ministries, the UN Resident Coordinator and members of the UN Country Team, co-chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health. This council will be supported at every local district by the District Food and Nutrition Security Committee that would also include NGOs, the private sector and the church. There will be a permanent technical secretariat with representatives from development partners, donor agencies and WFP, FAO, UNICEF and WHO to help with the implementation. The Government intends to allocate 10 percent of its annual budget until 2025 for implementation. This is a huge national effort that has been put in place to achieve the goals of Zero Hunger. The whole national effort will report regularly to both the Prime Minister and me, as the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General.

According to the FAO, this work in Timor-Leste has also set a new global standard for how campaign goals can be

realised and how Zero Hunger should be implemented in all regions of the world. It also shows what development partners can achieve working together as a system to support the leadership and the people of Timor-Leste. More importantly, it shows the difference that can happen when there is leadership and political will at the country level.

Timor-Leste, it sounds, has been very progressive, not just with how it spends its money, but also with how it has generated incomes through the country's natural reserves. What is your take on its petroleum reserves as to how it relates to the day-to-day living conditions of the Timorese?

The best way of describing this petroleum wealth is what the Prime Minister said in his Budget speech. He called it "the wind in our sails."⁵ He said it would have been impossible for Timor-Leste to be what it is today, to have stability, to focus on peace building, state building goals and development if they didn't have this petroleum wealth. They have been very good with the governance of this wealth. They haven't squandered it. They have followed the Norwegian model where they use 3 percent of the oil wealth for their development budget every year. They have been rated very positively by the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative⁶ as well as by the Santiago Principles.⁷ They even have a transparency portal.

Now, there is debate about where the money is going. On the one hand, the money has been used to help

fund the strategic development plan, and allocate for infrastructure, education and health. On the other, it has gone into the veteran social protection schemes, and this is where some of the problems exist. As far as the Prime Minister is concerned, he has brought peace because there was violence in 2006. He invested in peace. However, some people were concerned that money used for the veterans is not sustainable and inclusive. They believe the funds should be used much more for the productive sectors. Indeed, it has been. There is even allocation for the Oecusse Special Economic Zone, which is headed by the leader of the Opposition.

This is a small country. The leader of the opposition, the Prime Minister and the former president all feel a shared responsibility for the country. They've put away their personal differences for a more collective approach and built in checks and balances. If there's corruption, I don't think it'll be at the top, but it will be because there is leakage somewhere at the lower levels. But I don't see it as a country that is corrupt.

It sounds like they've done a good job in combating corruption.

They've tried. It's still a work in progress. There are three leaders who are seen to have a lot of power in the country—Prime Minister Gusmao; Jose Ramos-Horta, the former president; and Mari Alkatiri, the former prime minister and current leader of the opposition. Because of their shared responsibility and the caring of the country, they also provide checks and balances. Of course, they still have major development challenges, and the region should help.

We hear that Prime Minister Gusmao in 2002 said that there were a lot of international donors who had wanted to invest in the country, not in the critical areas like roads or schools but in things like latrines because that's part of their own development plans. How have Timor-Leste's experiences been from your perspective? How does the country relate to international aid donors?

The Timorese are right in saying that the country should be in the driver's seat, and that the donors should align

their priorities with the country's strategic development plans. But I think they've even gone beyond themselves by being the first chair of the g7+.

The g7+ is a group of 20 conflict-affected fragile countries that came together to have a much stronger voice. They feel the international community was not listening to their concerns. Many challenges are beyond their own control and these countries need a responsive international community interface. They identify five g7+ goals focusing on state building and peace building.⁸

The first one is more inclusive and *legitimate politics*, because conflict usually starts with a group who feel they have been left out. The politics and the government structures have not involved them. In other words, they are socially and politically excluded. So they put legitimate politics as a goal which few before thought as necessary for development.

The second one looks at *security* to really ensure that people can live safely and securely. The third is *justice*. You can't have security unless people feel that their grievances are being addressed. You have to acknowledge that injustices have been done. You need access to justice though that alone isn't enough; you also need strong *economic and social foundations* that can generate decent lives and productive jobs so that people can build a future of dignity, fairness and well-being as they put their past behind them.

Finally, they also looked at the use of *revenues*. Many conflicts have been fought over natural resource (oil, diamonds, timber, etc.) That's why it's called a resource curse. They have looked at revenue generation and how to convert that into the capacity of the state and institutions to deliver quality services and development for their people, with their people.

The experiences shared among these 20 countries is South-South cooperation to move countries out of fragility into greater resilience. Again, Timor-Leste is taking the lead. ■

Endnotes

- 1 The United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET, June–October 1999) was a political mission mandated to organise and conduct a popular consultations to ascertain whether the East Timorese people accepted a special autonomy within Indonesia or rejected the proposed special autonomy, leading to East Timor's separation from Indonesia. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET, October 1999–May 2002), a peacekeeping mission, was established by the Security Council following the rejection of special autonomy by the majority of East Timorese, and assumed administrative authority over East Timor during the transition to independence. Following independence, the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET, May 2002–May 2005), also a peacekeeping mission, was mandated to provide assistance to the newly independent East Timor until all operational responsibilities were fully devolved to the East Timor authorities, and to permit the new nation, now called Timor-Leste, to attain self-sufficiency. After the withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission, a new political mission, the United Nations Office in East Timor (UNOTIL), (May 2005–August 2006), was established to support the development of critical State institutions and the police and provided training in observance of democratic governance and human rights. Finally, the United Nations Integrated Mission in East Timor (UNMIT, August 2006–December 2012) was established to support the Timorese government in consolidating stability, democratic governance and political dialogue and reconciliation among all Timorese.
- 2 Zero Hunger Challenge, www.un.org/en/zerohunger/challenge.shtml
- 3 “Rio+20: Secretary-General challenges nations to achieve ‘zero hunger’,” UN News Centre, 22 June 2012, www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42304#.VAMfaBy55R4
- 4 “United Nations launches Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and the Pacific,” Press release issued on 29 April 2013, UNESCAP, www.unescap.org/news/united-nations-launches-zero-hunger-challenge-asia-and-pacific
- 5 Address by His Excellency The Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao on the occasion of the Presentation of the Draft Budget Law for 2014, www.laohamutuk.org/econ/OGE14/XGOG2014_9Jan2014en.pdf
- 6 Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives, <http://eiti.org/>
- 7 “Generally Accepted Principles and Practices (GAPP)—Santiago Principles,” International Working Group of Sovereign Wealth Funds, www.iwg-swf.org/pubs/gapplist.htm
- 8 g7+, www.g7plus.org/new-deal-document/